

“A meanes to knitt them together”: The Exchange of Body Parts in the Pequot War

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IN the early seventeenth century, when New England was still very new, Indians and colonists exchanged many things: furs, beads, pots, cloth, scalps, hands, and heads. The first exchanges of body parts came during the 1637 Pequot War, a punitive campaign fought by English colonists and their native allies against the Pequot people. Throughout the war Mohegans, Narragansetts, and other native peoples gave parts of slain Pequots to their English partners. At one point deliveries of trophies were so frequent that colonists stopped keeping track of individual parts, referring instead to the “still many Pequods’ heads and hands” that “came almost daily.” Most secondary accounts of the war only mention trophies in passing, seeing them as just another grisly aspect of this notoriously violent conflict.¹ But these incidents were

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¹ John Winthrop, *The History of New England from 1630 to 1649*, ed. James Savage (1825; repr., New York, 1972), 1: 237 (“still many Pequods’ heads”); John Mason, *A Brief History of the Pequot War: Especially Of the memorable Taking of their Fort at Mistick in Connecticut In 1637* (Boston, 1736), 17 (“came almost daily”). There are several historians who have given trophy exchanges more than a passing glance. See James Axtell and William C. Sturtevant, “The Unkindest Cut, or Who Invented Scalping?” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 37, no. 3 (July 1980): 451–72; Axtell, “The Moral Dilemmas of Scalping,” in *Natives and Newcomers: The Cultural Origins of North America* (New York, 2001), 259–279. Evan Haefeli examines trophies’ place within two different “cultures of violence” in an essay on a contemporary Dutch-Indian war. See Haefeli, “Kieft’s War and the Cultures of Violence in Colonial America,” in *Lethal Imagination: Violence and Brutality in American History*, ed. Michael A. Bellesiles (New York, 1999), 17–40. Jill Lepore analyzes the meanings embedded in severed body parts for both cultures during King Philip’s War, though she emphasizes display rather than exchange. See Lepore, *The Name of War: King*

more than just a macabre footnote. They were a strange kind of negotiation, a cross-cultural conversation rendered in flesh and blood.

Algonquian Indians often exchanged wartime trophies to affirm alliances, whereas the English decapitated enemies and displayed their heads to establish dominance. Because body parts were symbols of political relationships in both cultures, these acts of giving were a way for the two peoples to express and mediate their different notions of authority. Narragansett sachem Miantonomo described what he saw as the function of such exchanges when he began to plot a war against English and Dutch colonists in 1642. At a meeting with his coconspirators, Miantonomo told them that "when the designe should be putt in execution he would kill an Englishman & send his heade & handes to Longe Iland," and the Indians of Long Island and those near the Dutch should do the same, "& this would be a meanes to knitt them togeather." Miantonomo's phrase aptly suggests how body parts could represent relationships. Anthropologists note that exchanged objects symbolize thoughts and values, define the flow of power within societies, and foster expectations between givers and receivers. Exchanges between cultures in particular deserve close attention because different peoples attach multiple and sometimes conflicting meanings to the same things.²

Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity (New York, 1998), 148, 173–80, 190, 303 n. 103. Discussing the bounties for wolves' heads in New England, Jon T. Coleman made connections between colonists' and Indians' uses of human parts and their uses of animal parts. See Coleman, "Terms of Dismemberment," *Common-place* 4, no. 1 (October 2003), <http://common-place.dreamhost.com/vol-04/no-01/coleman/coleman-2.shtml>.

² "Relation of the Plott—Indian," in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 3d ser., 3: 161–64 (quotation, 164). These heads, scalps, and hands are prime examples of what anthropologist Nicholas Thomas calls "entangled objects": material artifacts of colonial encounters that are invested with so many meanings that they cannot be located within a single cultural context. See Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 1–23. Several other thinkers have also influenced this article, including Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (New York, 1986), 3–63; Christopher L. Miller and George R. Hamell, "A New Perspective on Indian-White Contact: Cultural Symbols and Colonial Trade," *Journal of American History* 73, no. 2 (September 1986): 311–28; Laurier Turgeon, "The Tale of the Kettle: Odyssey of an Intercultural Object," *Ethnohistory* 44, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 1–29; Cynthia Jean Van Zandt, "Negotiating Settlement: Colonialism, Cultural Exchange, and Conflict in Early Colonial Atlantic North America, 1580–1660" (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1998); David Murray, *Indian Giving: Economies of Power in Indian-White Exchanges* (Amherst, Mass., 2000); Fred R. Myers, ed., *The Empire of Things: Regimes of Value and Material Culture* (Santa Fe, N.Mex., 2001), 3–61; Regina Janes, *Losing Our Heads: Beheadings in Literature and Culture* (New York, 2005), esp. chap. 5, "African Heads and Imperial Décolletage: Beheadings in the Colonies," 139–75.

At first heads, hands, and scalps conveyed simple messages about trust and power that were understood by natives and newcomers, strengthening their partnership during the campaign against the Pequots. Yet any such pidgin communications obscured many secondary meanings, causing disagreements about what exactly the exchanges symbolized. In the years following the war, some Indians became disillusioned with their alliance with colonists, arguing that it was built on faulty assumptions of cultural sameness and that the English were violating its fundamental terms. These exchanges demonstrate the peculiar character of frontier relationships at this early stage in the colonization of New England. By attempting a military conquest at a moment when they could not yet assert cultural hegemony, colonists dealt with Indians in ways that were at once aggressive and accommodating.³

When reading descriptions of the English spectacle of drawing and quartering and the Algonquian ritual of torturing captives, it is tempting to

³ In the voluminous historiography of the Pequot War, few scholars have emphasized cultural accommodation as a major feature of the English victory, though that appears to be changing. Jenny Hale Pulsipher points out the large degree of negotiation and flexibility in the early stage of Indian-English relationships in New England and argues that the years after the 1637 war were a turning point. See Pulsipher, *Subjects unto the Same King: Indians, English, and the Contest for Authority in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia, 2005), 8–36. More typical is the debate between Adam J. Hirsch and Ronald Dale Karr about the English incineration of a Pequot village on the Mystic River. Hirsch posits that English frustration with the Indians' military tactics caused the colonists to resort to a ruthless new form of frontier combat, whereas Karr insists that the decision to burn the village was not a novel tactic; instead, it reflected how the colonists saw the Pequots as illegitimate enemies. Despite their differences, both scholars emphasize "drastic cultural imbalances" and "the failure to establish reciprocity between the military cultures of the English Puritan forces and the Pequots." See Hirsch, "The Collision of Military Cultures in Seventeenth-Century New England," *Journal of American History* 74, no. 4 (March 1988): 1187–1212 ("drastic cultural imbalances," 1209); Karr, "Why Should You Be So Furious? The Violence of the Pequot War," *Journal of American History* 85, no. 3 (December 1998): 876–909 ("failure to establish reciprocity," 909). Much of the literature on the war builds from a debate between the self-confessed puritan hater Francis Jennings and the reluctant puritan apologist Alden T. Vaughan. See Vaughan, "Pequots and Puritans: The Causes of the War of 1637," *WMQ* 21, no. 2 (April 1964): 256–69; Vaughan, *The New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620–1675* (Boston, 1965), 93–154; Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (New York, 1975), 177–227; Vaughan, "Pequots and Puritans: The Causes of the War of 1637," in *Roots of American Racism: Essays on the Colonial Experience* (New York, 1995), 177–99. The most detailed treatment to date is Alfred A. Cave, *The Pequot War* (Amherst, Mass., 1996). Other major interpretations include Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500–1643* (New York, 1982), 166–239; Laurence M. Hauptman, "The Pequot War and Its Legacies," in *The Pequots in Southern New England: The Fall and Rise of an American Indian Nation*, ed.

conclude that the two traditions of human butchery were essentially alike. But doing so obscures the vast differences between the social structures of the two peoples and ignores how violent acts can be shaped by larger cultural contexts. The English employed many kinds of punishment that involved dismemberment. Drawing and quartering was their most elaborate ritual: a criminal would be hanged, disemboweled, emasculated, and decapitated, and the remainder of his corpse would be divided into quarters. English officials also sentenced criminals to have their hands, ears, and tongues cut off and condemned others to be beheaded. Of all the body parts that the English severed in sickening numbers, the object that they valued the most (and thus the object that expressed the most of their values) was the head. Heads supplied an obvious metaphor for hierarchy, indicated by the use of the word "crown" as a metonym for the monarch. The words "capital," "capitulate," and "captain," like "decapitate," all derive from the Latin *caput*, meaning head.⁴ Appropriately, the English often reserved beheading for high treason, the most capital offense. The beheaded tended to be the most powerful members of society: subversive preachers, scheming nobles, and pretenders to the throne.

During the tumultuous century of religious strife and dynastic crises that preceded the colonization of New England, the headsman at the Tower of London were constantly busy. To some extent these beheadings had a clear function; the sovereign who was quick to cut off the heads of would-be usurpers remained the tallest person in the realm. The Tudor and early Stuart concept of monarchy was far more nuanced; subjects had notions of kingly authority as reciprocal and contractual. When some citizens believed that King Charles I had violated the compact between a king and his people, the monarch himself lost his head. Scholars who have studied the symbolism of capital punishment in this period suggest that executions were essentially a genre of real-life morality plays that cast "traitors living and dead in the staging of royal power."⁵

Hauptman and James D. Wherry (Norman, Okla., 1990), 69–95; Steven T. Katz, "The Pequot War Reconsidered," *New England Quarterly* 64, no. 2 (June 1991): 206–24; Michael L. Fickes, "They Could Not Endure That Yoke': The Captivity of Pequot Women and Children after the War of 1637," *New England Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (March 2000): 58–81; Michael Leroy Oberg, *Uncas: The First of the Mohegans* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2003), 34–86.

⁴ Janes, *Losing Our Heads*, 1–9; *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "capital," "decapitate." To compare English colonists' and coastal Algonquians' methods of torture and dismemberment succinctly, the following sections present some broad generalizations, which are not meant to imply that either society was static but rather to demonstrate that each had distinct practices of dismemberment before their first major conflict.

⁵ Numerous scholars have investigated the symbolism of early modern executions with a focus on their theatrical properties, including Karin S. Coddon,

There was something undeniably theatrical about a monarch turning his subjects into objects. Not surprisingly, detached heads had key roles in many dramas of the English Renaissance, in particular Christopher Marlowe's *Edward the Second* and *Doctor Faustus* and William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, *Cymbeline*, *Richard III*, and *Macbeth*. For fictional and real-life monarchs, the severed head became a useful prop. When Marlowe's Edward II considered how to put down a brewing revolt, one of the king's advisers recommended that he should "Strike off their heads, and let them preach on poles. / No doubt, such lessons they will teach the rest, / As by their preachments they will profit much, / And learn obedience to their lawful king."⁶ Marlowe suggested that in taking life, the king reminded his subjects of the source of his authority and turned the heads of his rebellious subjects into preachers, messengers of his and God's words demanding obedience down the great chain of being.

English royals frequently placed severed heads in prominent locations around London such as Aldgate, Temple Bar, and London Bridge, and sheriffs repeated the practice in larger towns throughout the realm. Executioners often parboiled the heads of traitors; that is, they quickly cooked them in hot water, which temporarily arrested decay. The practice preserved the heads so that they would remain recognizable longer, though sometimes this kind of prop mastery worked too well. In 1535, two weeks after the execution of John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, Londoners were aghast to notice that his head "grew daily fresher and fresher, so that in his lifetime he never looked so well; for his cheeks being beautified with a comely red, the face looked as though it had beholden the people passing by, and would have spoken to them." Despite the indignities of a postmortem display, doomed nobles actually

"Unreal Mockery": Unreason and the Problem of Spectacle in *Macbeth*," *English Literary History* 56, no. 3 (Autumn 1989): 485–501 ("traitors living and dead," 499). See also Karen Cunningham, "Renaissance Execution and Marlovian Elocution: The Drama of Death," *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 105, no. 2 (March 1990): 209–22; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 2d ed. (New York, 1995), 3–103; Philip Smith, "Executing Executions: Aesthetics, Identity, and the Problematic Narratives of Capital Punishment Ritual," *Theory and Society* 25, no. 2 (April 1996): 235–61; Janes, *Losing Our Heads*, 1–96; Susan Zimmerman, *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare's Theatre* (Edinburgh, Scotland, 2005), 1–23. For an overview of the English uses of beheadings, see John Laurence, *A History of Capital Punishment* (New York, 1960), 28–29. For an overview of how English colonists conceived of monarchical authority, see T. H. Breen, *The Character of the Good Ruler: A Study of Puritan Political Ideas in New England, 1630–1730* (New Haven, Conn., 1970), 46–48; James D. Drake, *King Philip's War: Civil War in New England, 1675–1676* (Amherst, Mass., 1999), 44–48.

⁶ Christopher Marlowe, *Edward the Second*, in J. B. Steane, ed., *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays* (New York, 1969), 484 (act 3, scene 2, lines 20–23).

preferred decapitation, seeing it as less painful and more dignified than the alternatives. Yet being dispatched on the chopping block was not always as swift as some hoped. In many executions, including Sir Walter Raleigh's, the headsman found it necessary to drop his axe twice.⁷

Whereas English nobles typically only had the elites of the realm beheaded, soldiers sometimes beheaded foreigners in a more indiscriminate fashion. In a notorious 1569 incident during the Tudor reconquest of Ireland, Sir Humphrey Gilbert unleashed a total war against the defiant people of Munster. Declaring that "the stiffe necked must be made to stoupe," Gilbert decapitated the bodies of slain rebels and created a grisly "lane of heddes" leading to his tent so that approaching villagers would have to pass "the heddes of their dedde fathers, brothers, children, kinsfolke, and freendes." Describing this horrific scene, Gilbert's propagandist took pains to assure his readers that such extreme "*ad terrorem*" measures were necessary to end the natives' uprising. Half a century later, English colonists in America again used spectacle to encourage submission. In 1622 Plymouth settlers heard rumors of a Massachusetts Indian plot to kill the English. A company led by the colony's chief soldier, Miles Standish, removed the head of the lead conspirator and placed it outside the gate to Plymouth's fort, where it remained, slowly rotting, for more than a year.⁸

New England colonists' ideal vision of how to make stiff-necked enemies stoop was not just informed by Elizabethan Ireland; it dated back to biblical Israel. The puritans envisioned their arrival in America as a continuation of a scriptural narrative. And for many the most fitting biblical role model was King David. The books of Samuel depicted David as a righteous believer and the savior of Israel while showing his predecessor, Saul, to be an inadequate pretender. David's life, especially his exile into the wilderness, offered inspiration to the colonists who fled

⁷ Laurence, *History of Capital Punishment*, 30–33 (quotation, 33); Cunningham, *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 105: 212–13. One of the convicted conspirators in the 1605 Gunpowder Plot, Sir Everard Digby, pleaded to be beheaded on the logic that his status as a gentleman merited a more dignified death. The court was not swayed and Digby was drawn and quartered with the others. See James Sharpe, *Remember, Remember: A Cultural History of Guy Fawkes Day* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 72–76. For Raleigh's execution, see H. L. Stephen, ed., *State Trials: Political and Social* (1899; repr., New York, 1971), 1: 60–61, 71.

⁸ Thomas Churchyard, *A Generall Rehearsall of warres, called Churchyardes Choise* (London, 1579), n. p. (quotations). For further discussions of English notions of a just war, see Karr, *Journal of American History* 85: 880–88, esp. 885–88; Lepore, *Name of War*, 105–13. An overview of how the colonization of Ireland influenced the colonization of America is found in Nicholas P. Canny, "The Ideology of English Colonization: From Ireland to America," *WMQ* 30, no. 4 (October 1973): 575–98. For a discussion of Standish's actions at Plymouth, see Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 130; Axtell and Sturtevant, *WMQ* 37: 464.

the rule of Charles I and Archbishop William Laud and saw their settlements as the salvation of England. David's wars against the Canaanites also included numerous slaughters, beheadings, and other mutilations. Young David's greatest act was to slay the oversized Philistine Goliath. Just before he drew his sling, David declared: "This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel." After felling Goliath, David decapitated the massive body and proudly toted his trophy back to Jerusalem, appearing before Saul with the giant's head in his hand. Though this beheading was more about David proving himself to Saul than intimidating the Philistines, it marked the beginning of David's repeated tactic of dismembering his heathen foes, precedents that colonists would later invoke as a justification for their actions against the Pequots.⁹

The sacred history of Israel, like the accounts of Ireland, authorized beheadings and dismemberments in a war against intractable enemies. To Christian authorities these examples proved that when true believers were

⁹ 1 Sam. 17:46 (quotation). See also 1 Sam. 17:49–57 for the slaying of Goliath and the return to Jerusalem. For discussion of how colonists compared their "errand into the wilderness" to biblical ordeals, see James Axtell, "The Scholastic Philosophy of the Wilderness," *WMQ* 29, no. 3 (July 1972): 335–66; William S. Simmons, "Cultural Bias in the New England Puritans' Perception of Indians," *WMQ* 38, no. 1 (January 1981): 56–72. Puritans also saw David as the author of the book of Psalms, making him a key source of spiritual inspiration. See Michael D. Coogan et al., eds., "Introduction to 1 Samuel" and "Introduction to Psalms," *The New Oxford Annotated Bible (New Revised Standard Version)*, 3d ed. (Oxford, Eng., 2001), 398–99, 775–77. In John Winthrop's famed sermon "A Modell of Christian Charity," written en route to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, he offered the disobedient Saul as a cautionary example: "When God giues a speciall Commission he lookes to haue it stricktly obserued in every Article, when hee gaue Saule a Commission to destroy Amaleck hee indented with him vpon certaine Articles and because hee failed in one of the least . . . it lost him the kingdome." See Massachusetts Historical Society, *Winthrop Papers* (Boston, 1931), 2: 282–95 (quotation, 294). Many ordinary puritans also drew inspiration from David's story. "I cryed out *David*-like, I shall one day perish by the hands of *Saul*," recalled a young woman who was briefly kidnapped by the Pequots, "I shall one day dye by the hands of these barbarous *Indians*." See John Underhill, *Nevves From America; Or, A new and experimentall discoverie of New England . . .* (1638; repr., Amsterdam, Netherlands, 1971), 30. The quotation is a reference to the moment David decided to flee Israel, which could well be a maxim for all "godly" colonists: "And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand" (1 Sam. 27:1). For further examples of David ordering bodily mutilations and dismemberments, see 1 Sam. 18:25–27, 2 Sam. 4:12.

faced with unacceptable insolence, God mandated this special brand of mayhem. English law seemingly accommodated Davidic precedents. Noting the prevalence of dismemberment in the Bible, English jurist Sir Edward Coke legitimized these actions as “godly butchery.”¹⁰ Inspired by their holy texts and by the daily realities of early modern England, colonists found dismemberment a useful practice to assert their authority over a foreign land. Severed heads enabled sovereigns and their surrogates to strengthen their power and illustrate their righteousness.

Coastal Algonquians also saw human fragments as representations of power and order, albeit in ways specific to their own culture. Sachems (Indian political leaders) did not have a country and subjects but rather *sontimooonk* and *kannootammanshittogik*, literally, a sachemship and defenders of the sachemship. Unlike the monarchical and monotheistic colonists, Algonquian leaders drew their authority from a series of oral traditions and gift exchanges that defined relationships between rulers and the ruled, between the human and spirit worlds. The largest sachemships along the southern coast of New England—the Wampanoag, Narragansetts, and Pequots—had a male “chief” sachem and multiple lesser sachems who paid the chief tribute in return for promises of protection. Sachems accepted gifts such as wampum (shell beads) and maize, then gave gifts in return, fostering a sense of trust and obligation between themselves and their defenders. In comparison with the English king, or even a colonial governor, a sachem’s authority was far more limited and reciprocal; his primary means of exercising power were collecting gifts, redistributing them, waging war, and maintaining peace. Still sachems, like monarchs, could punish treason. Roger Williams observed that “sometimes the *Sachim* sends a secret *Executioner*, one of his cheifest Warriours to fetch of[f] a head . . . when they have feared Mutiny by publike execution.”¹¹

¹⁰ Laurence, *History of Capital Punishment*, 11 (quotation). George Lee Haskins cautions that the Bible “was an indispensable touchstone, but not the cornerstone, of Puritan legal thinking,” yet he also notes that New England colonists closely adhered to scriptural definitions of capital crimes. See Haskins, *Law and Authority in Early Massachusetts: A Study in Tradition and Design* (New York, 1960), 118, 141–53, 162 (quotation). Some Massachusetts capital statutes were nearly word-for-word transcriptions of biblical passages.

¹¹ Roger Williams, *A Key Into the Language of America; Or, An help to the Language of the Natives in that part of America called New-England* . . . (1643; repr., Bedford, Mass., 1997), 136 (quotation). Colonists found numerous kinds of sachemships, including groups that seemed to lack any paramount leader and groups led by women, particularly to the east toward the Cape and the Islands. The Narragansetts had a unique power-sharing arrangement in which the elder Canonius and his nephew Miantonomo were cosachems, though by the time of the Pequot War it appears Miantonomo was the principal diplomatic leader for the

Though severed parts occasionally represented executive power, more often they were symbols of war. Coastal natives rarely waged war to accumulate territories; they fought to avenge murders and to accumulate people and things of symbolic and practical value. The most prized plunder of war was a live captive. Women and children were usually assimilated into their captors' lineages. Captured warriors often had to face an excruciating and slow death; they would be methodically dismembered in front of an entire village and expected to remain brave and stoic under the duress of torture. These ceremonies usually included the amputation of hands and feet and culminated in either the beheading or scalping of the captive. The methodic and public slaughter of a male captive was a cathartic theatrical performance where Indians could vent their anger for a wrongful death and revel in their victory over a bitter enemy. It also gave the enemy warrior a chance to redeem the honor he lost in being captured by demonstrating his fearlessness toward death. Colonial observers were often aghast at the torture of captives but, at the same time, they had to admit that Indian conflicts were far more restrained and concentrated than European wars, where victories were often measured by the total number of enemies slain. To Indians, killing on a large scale was wasteful and dangerous; it only served to perpetuate violence. They much preferred butchering a few foes in a deliberate fashion to gain emotional rewards.¹²

Native Americans did not just dismember living captives, they also mutilated the wounded and dead on the battlefield. According to Williams, when "their arrow sticks in the body of their enemy . . . they follow their arrow, and falling upon the person wounded and tearing his head a little aside by his Locke, they in the twinkling of an eye fetch off his head though but with a sorry [dull] knife." The Narragansetts called this act *Timequassin*, which Williams translated as "*To cut off or behead.*"

tribe, since he dealt with Roger Williams more frequently than his uncle. See Kathleen J. Bragdon, *The Native People of Southern New England, 1500-1650* (Norman, Okla., 1996), 40-41; Paul A. Robinson, "Lost Opportunities: Miantonomi and the English in Seventeenth-Century Narragansett Country," in *Northeastern Indian Lives, 1632-1816*, ed. Robert S. Grumet (Amherst, Mass., 1996), 13-28, esp. 21-24. For an overview of the contrast between English and Algonquian notions of authority, see Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 37-49; Bragdon, *Native People of Southern New England*, 44-49, 130-39, 140-55; Pulsipher, *Subjects unto the Same King*, 1-36. For a discussion of the long theoretical debate about the role of the gift in nonstate societies from Marcel Mauss to Marshall Sahlins and its relevance to Indian and colonial exchanges in early America, see Murray, *Indian Giving*, 15-47.

¹² Daniel K. Richter, "War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience," *WMQ* 40, no. 4 (October 1983): 528-59, esp. 529-37; Hirsch, *Journal of American History* 74: 1190-92; Patrick M. Malone, *The Skulking Way of War: Technology and Tactics among the New England Indians* (Baltimore, 1993), 9-11; Bragdon, *Native People of Southern New England*, 148-50, 226.

As Williams's description indicates, *Timequassin* probably also referred to the more famous and widespread native practice of scalping; the two practices can be viewed as part of the same tradition. Because Indians believed that the "free" soul—their closest analogue to the European concept of an eternal soul—was anchored in the head, scholars have suggested that beheading and scalping were intended to keep the free soul from reaching "the Southwest," the peaceful and plentiful land of the dead. Colonists were sometimes vague in their references to this custom, using the word "head" interchangeably with "scalp" or "head-skin." In New England "heads" meant whole heads as well; whereas Williams seemed to be describing a scalping, other colonists witnessed full decapitations. Archaeologists have found evidence to support the prevalence of beheading, including the gravesite of a seventeenth-century headless Narragansett woman. By the time of King Philip's War in the 1670s, the colonial records had more explicit references to scalping, though this shift may have reflected the vast scale of that particular conflict. In his account of the war, William Hubbard observed that the natives in the region preferred heads to scalps and only took the latter "when it is too far to carry the heads."¹³

Hands and feet were another matter. Among some native peoples, torture rituals also incorporated cannibalism. Indians ate their enemies only for spiritual, not nutritional, benefits, and they often favored meat from the hands and feet. Most sources indicate that cannibalism was either forbidden or very rare among coastal Algonquians, who associated

¹³ Williams, *Key Into the Language of America*, 50–51 ("their arrow sticks"); William Scranton Simmons, *Cautantowwit's House: An Indian Burial Ground on the Island of Conanicut in Narragansett Bay* (Providence, R.I., 1970), 54–55 ("free," "Southwest"); Axtell and Sturtevant, *WMQ* 37: 462–63, 465, 469 n. 52 ("head-skin," 461–62); William Hubbard, *The History of the Indian Wars in New England from the First Settlement to the Termination of the War with King Philip, in 1677 . . .*, ed. Samuel G. Drake (1865; repr., New York, 1969), 2: 206 ("when it is too far"). For a discussion of how Indians related torture to justice and catharsis, see Richter, *WMQ* 40: 529–37; Haefeli, "Kieft's War," 20–22. Among scholars who study the origins of Indian dismemberment, Simmons only discusses heads, whereas Axtell suggests that among Indians who favored scalps over heads, the "scalplock" (the tuft of decorated hair that Indian men styled to represent their tribal identities) also "represented the person's 'soul' or living spirit" (Axtell, "Moral Dilemmas of Scalping," 262). See also Simmons, *Cautantowwit's House*, 52, 54–55; Bragdon, *Native People of Southern New England*, 190–91. The headless woman found by archaeologists is known as "Burial 13" and was probably a Narragansett woman more than thirty years old at the time of death. According to Simmons, "her missing skull could not be attributed to modern pot hunters, for the grave had not been disturbed. The woman could only have been beheaded before burial." The objects in her grave and the ones around her date to the postcontact seventeenth century (but not to a particular decade). See Simmons, *Cautantowwit's House*, 102 (quotation), 105–6. For a discussion of Indians' preference for whole heads, see Lepore, *Name of War*, 303 n. 103.

anthropophagy with inland Iroquoian peoples. But it is possible that their practice of cutting extremities off the captured and dead was a vestige from a time when they engaged in cannibalism. One historian has also posited that Indians dismembered dying enemies as figurative means of taking their foes captive.¹⁴ In some ways the origins of the practice matter less than its ultimate metaphorical significance. Whether it derived from capturing enemies or eating them, the Indian custom of taking body parts was a symbolic means of taking possession of enemies and consuming their spiritual strength.

Body parts were trophies in the sense that they were mementos of a violent act, yet they stood for more than just a single man's triumph over another. Warriors were not only expected to take trophies but also compelled to give them. Colonial promoter William Wood observed that when Indians "returne [as] conquerours[,] they carrie the heads of their chiefe enemies that they slay in the wars: it being the custome to cut off their heads, hands, and feete, to beare home to their wives and children, as true tokens of their renowned victorie." Williams also noticed that the Narragansetts were "much delighted after battell to hang up the hands and heads of their enemies." By bringing body parts back to their village, Indian men demonstrated their own bravery and fulfilled their duties as warriors by producing "a visible sign of justice done."¹⁵ Heads, scalps, hands, and feet evoked the central rituals of Indian military culture, making them weighty objects in native systems of obligation.

Deliveries of severed parts from a warrior to a sachem or from one sachem to another showed a firm alliance, like that of kin. Miantonomo's phrase "a meanes to knitt them togeather" perhaps best describes the political function of these exchanges. Like all gifts given to sachems, trophies fostered obligations between the giver and receiver. By accepting a trophy, a sachem demonstrated that he shared the grievances of the person delivering it. It also symbolized his commitment, since taking the head made him complicit in the act of killing and reinforced the ethos of mutual defense that held all sachemships together. Body parts were therefore valued tokens of reciprocity and loyalty. Williams related the tale of an Indian warrior who, pretending to defect from his own people, joined a group of his enemies as they went into battle. As the fighting began, he fired an arrow into the enemy sachem and "in a trice fetcht off his head and returned immediatly to his own againe." During

¹⁴ Axtell and Sturtevant, *WMQ* 37: 459–62; Richter, *WMQ* 40: 533–34; Haefeli, "Kieft's War," 20–22.

¹⁵ William Wood, *Wood's New-England's Prospect* (1634; repr., New York, 1967), 95 ("returne [as] conquerours"); Williams, *Key Into the Language of America*, 52 ("much delighted"); Haefeli, "Kieft's War," 21 ("visible sign").

the Pequot War, one soldier described an Indian delivery of scalps and hands "as a testimony of their love and service," and another interpreted a gift of heads from Indian allies "as a pledge of their further fidelity." Another incident comes from the nearby colony of New Netherland. When Algonquian-speaking Raritan Indians attacked Dutch colonists on Staten Island in 1640, the Dutch demanded the heads of the killers. A year later a Tankiteke sachem named Pachem arrived on Manhattan "in great triumph, bringing a dead hand hanging on a stick, and saying that it was the hand of the chief who had killed or shot with arrows our men on Staten Island, and that he had taken revenge for our sake, because he loved the Swannekens (as they call the Dutch), who were his best friends."¹⁶ Pachem intended his gift to be a token of love and friendship, which were common translations of Indian diplomatic phrases. The numerous exchanges of heads and hands throughout the war illustrated how Indians believed these grisly objects could represent and strengthen partnerships.

As the moment that these two distinct uses of body parts became linked, the Pequot War brought the parallels and contrasts between English beheading and Indian *Timequassin* into sharp relief. For colonists detached heads were always more important than any other body part because only heads conjured up the awesome authority of the English monarch and the even greater authority of the English god. Severed heads were most potent while at rest and on display in a prominent location, suggesting the futility of resistance, advertising the price of betrayal, and projecting the permanency of God's people in a new promised land. A displayed head functioned conclusively, like a period marking the end of a declarative sentence, bringing the episode of rebellion to a close. For Indians trophies only made sense within a system of warfare that centered on taking captives and torturing them. Native peoples also did not exclusively favor heads, seeing scalps and hands as similarly important objects. And though Indians displayed trophies, human pieces had more political significance while in motion and being passed from sachem to sachem because traveling trophies could bind the grievances of many into one. Indians saw heads and hands as connective, less like periods and more like semicolons in the middle of complex sentences linking past violent actions to conditional future actions. The

¹⁶ *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 3: 164 ("meanes to knitt"); Williams, *Key Into the Language of America*, 51 ("trice fetcht off"); Philip Vincent, *A True Relation of the Late Battell Fought in New England, Between the English, and the Salvages* (1637; repr., Amsterdam, Netherlands, 1974), 17 ("as a testimony"); Underhill, *News From America*, 25 ("as a pledge"); David Pietersz De Vries, "From the 'Korte Historiae Ende Journaels Aenteyckeninge' . . . (1655)," in Jameson, *Narratives of New Netherland*, 211 ("in great triumph").

intersection of these different meanings shaped Indian and English relationships during the war. Using human pieces as punctuation, natives and newcomers created shared idioms of power.

The 1630s were a turbulent decade for colonists and Indians. Epidemics began to thin the numbers of coastal natives while the great migration caused the English colonies to expand rapidly. These trends brought the two peoples into closer contact and eventually conflict. Historians now generally agree that the Pequot War began with a deliberate English attempt to seize trade and territory along the Connecticut River and Long Island Sound. No major group of Indians was more vulnerable than the Pequots, a once-mighty power located in the coastal area between the Thames and Pawcatuck rivers. At their peak in the late 1620s, Pequots had dominated trade with the Dutch and collected wampum tributes from numerous smaller sachemships on the Connecticut River and Long Island Sound. By the mid-1630s, though, the Pequots' heyday had passed. In 1633 Dutch colonists killed charismatic sachem Tatobem during a nasty trade dispute. That same year a smallpox epidemic further destabilized the trade in wampum, furs, and European goods. Shortly after Tatobem's ineffectual son Sassacus came to power in 1636, Mohegan sachem Uncas, who was once the Pequots' closest ally, cut his political and military ties with his old friends and kin.¹⁷

Adding to the Pequots' own troubles, the English accused them in 1634 of murdering a Virginia ship's captain named John Stone and eight of his crew. The English demanded that the Pequots act as surrogate executioners and "give us the heads of the murderers," but the sachems refused, believing Stone's killing to be just, and instead attempted to make peace with the English through gifts of wampum. Colonists paid little attention to these friendly overtures and continued to move closer to Pequot territory. In 1636 Massachusetts colonists founded the towns of Hartford, Windsor, and Wethersfield along the Connecticut River. That same year, using the unrelated murder of another English ship's

¹⁷ Jennings, *Invasion of America*, 190–91; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 207–11; Cave, *Pequot War*, 57–68; Eric S. Johnson, "Uncas and the Politics of Contact," in Grumet, *Northeastern Indian Lives*, 29–32. It is a common misconception that the Mohegans were once wholly part of the Pequot tribe and that Uncas created the tribe out of thin air. The evidence suggests they were a long-standing sachemship that paid tribute to the Pequots before 1636 just as many other smaller sachemships did. Culturally and linguistically, the two were closely related, though they were independent enough to develop different styles of pottery. See Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 41–49; Cave, *New England Quarterly* 62: 27–44; Kevin McBride, "The Historical Archaeology of the Mashantucket Pequots, 1637–1900," in Hauptman and Wherry, *Pequots in Southern New England*, 99; Cave, *Pequot War*, 40–43, 192 n. 63; Oberg, *Uncas*, 18–20.

master on Block Island as an excuse, colonists launched punitive attacks against the Pequots, burning an empty village and its surrounding cornfields.¹⁸

The English also sought the friendship of the other Indian sachems in the area who had long resented the Pequots. Roger Williams, who founded Providence in 1636 after being banished from Massachusetts, cultivated a strong personal relationship with Narragansett sachems Canonicus and Miantonomo, learning their language and diplomatic protocols. Colonists along the Connecticut River began to form a similar bond with the Mohegans and their ambitious sachem, Uncas. These sachems had much to gain in siding with the English. Powerful new friends could help them challenge the Pequots and strengthen their own sachemships. Personal ties to the newcomers would guarantee their access to a steady source of European trade goods, which in turn would allow them to maintain their rule over their smaller tributary groups. The English and Indian decision to marginalize the Pequots represented a calculated and mutually beneficial compromise between the colonists' desire for secure territory and their native allies' desire for protected trade. As the Pequots realized the true danger posed by these new alliances, they sought to reconcile their differences with their historic enemies, the Narragansetts. But the Narragansetts were eager to humble their old foes, refusing the proposal and quickly relaying news of it to the English.¹⁹

One way the Pequots' rivals bound themselves to the English was to offer intelligence; another was to offer heads. When Mohegan sachem Uncas pledged to help the colonists, some were wary because Uncas had only recently been the Pequots' closest ally. The English demanded a test of his loyalty. Uncas and his Mohegan warriors responded by delivering "five *Pequeats* heads" to Fort Saybrook at the mouth of the Connecticut River. "This mightily encouraged the hearts of all," Captain John Underhill remarked, "and wee tooke this as a pledge of their further fidelity." With this act Uncas demonstrated that he was agreeing to a pact of mutual defense and obligation. But once the heads were in

¹⁸ Underhill, *Nevves From America*, 9–15 (quotation, 10). There is a debate about whether Pequots or Western Niantics (a group of Pequot tributaries) actually killed Stone. Laurence M. Hauptman, Francis Jennings, and Neal Salisbury argue that the murderers were Niantics, making the English campaign against the Pequots all the more duplicitous. Alfred A. Cave concludes that, though Niantics were likely involved, the Pequots were primarily responsible for the murder. See Jennings, *Invasion of America*, 189–90, 194–95; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 210–11, 218; Hauptman, "Pequot War and Its Legacies," 72; Cave, *WMQ* 49: 509–21.

¹⁹ Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 212–15; Pulsipher, *Subjects unto the Same King*, 21–22; Robinson, "Lost Opportunities," 21–22; Johnson, "Uncas and the Politics of Contact," 32–33.

English hands, they were translated from tokens of allegiance into props of dominance; the commander of Saybrook "set all their heads upon the fort," just as a king would display the heads of traitors.²⁰ Objects that the Mohegans offered to cement promises between themselves and the English now carried an additional layer of meaning. In English eyes the five heads affirmed Uncas's loyalty and stated the consequences of defying colonial authority.

When receiving trophies, colonists made a habit of responding with another gift. Soon after Uncas delivered his heads, a party of Narragansetts came to Boston "with forty fathom of wampom and a Pequod's hand"; the English governor gave them four coats in exchange. Williams had a major influence on the English decision to respond to Indian gifts with other gifts. Later he would rightfully take much of the credit for winning over native support against the Pequots, boasting that he broke "to pieces the Pequets negociation and Designe" of an anti-English alliance and discharged most of the diplomatic legwork to create "the English Leauge with the Nahiggoniks and Monhiggins." Williams not only performed much of the face-to-face negotiation with Indians but also wrote letters instructing his fellow colonists on how to meet native expectations of reciprocity and even counseled them on appropriate gifts for particular men.²¹ Though many colonial leaders grasped the importance of giving back to Indians, they never perfected or standardized the practice. The English were too inconsistent with their counter gifts for these rewards to be characterized as bounties. Accordingly, it would be a mistake to say that trophies were commodified during the Pequot War as scalps later were in other North American conflicts.

In 1636 a single Indian began circulating a trophy that galvanized the anti-Pequot alliance and started the war in earnest. Cutshamakin, a Massachusetts warrior and guide to the English, "crept into a swamp and killed a Pequot, and having flayed off the skin of his head, he sent it to

²⁰ Underhill, *Neves From America*, 24–25 ("five Pequeats heads," 25); Winthrop, *History of New England*, 1: 223 ("set all their heads"). In his account Lion Gardener only mentions that the Pequots killed four men. See Gardener, "Leift. Lion Gardener his relation of the Pequot Warres," in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 3d ser., 3: 131–60, esp. 3: 149.

²¹ Winthrop, *History of New England*, 1: 217 ("with forty fathom"); Roger Williams to John Mason and Thomas Prentice, June 22, 1670, in Glenn W. LaFantasie, ed., *The Correspondence of Roger Williams* (Hanover, N.H., 1988), 2: 609–23 ("to pieces," 2: 611). When tutoring his countrymen in the ways of native gift giving, Williams hinted to the Massachusetts colonists that a Pequot spy would like a new coat and advised them that "For any gratuities or tokens," one Narragansett sachem "desires Sugar," whereas the other preferred "powder." See Roger Williams to the Governor of Massachusetts, [May 13, 1637], in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Winthrop Papers*, 3: 410–12 (quotation, 412).

[elder Narragansett sachem] Canonicus, who presently sent it to all the sachems about him." Once the scalp finally reached English hands, they rewarded the assassin with "four fathom of wampom." Cutshamakin's gift was not simply an example of an Indian offering a token of loyalty to his supposed overlords; it was crucial that the scalp passed through a series of Indian villages before it got to Boston. These exchanges further committed the Narragansetts to the English cause because handling the scalp made Canonicus a culprit in the unknown Pequot's death and sending it to the English ensured their shared complicity, though it is unclear if the English saw the gift in that light. Cutshamakin's scalping hardened the English-Indian alliance and turned the Pequots into a hostile force. Lion Gardener, the English commander at Fort Saybrook, demonstrated a general understanding of the scalping's significance when he declared, "thus began the war between the Indians and us in these parts."²²

First came a flurry of Pequot raids on the English at Fort Saybrook, where warriors killed a few colonists and captured John Tilley and later tortured him, cutting off his hands and feet. Then the Pequots attacked the new settlement of Wethersfield, where warriors killed nine people and carried off two English girls, whom the Indians later released. These raids further escalated the stakes of the conflict, leading Connecticut to declare in May 1637 "that there shalbe an offensiue warr ag[ains]t the Pequoitte." Joined by several hundred Mohegan, Narragansett, and Eastern Niantic allies, the colonists planned a surprise attack on the Pequots from the east. Before dawn on May 26, 1637, they marched toward a large, fortified Pequot village near the Mystic River. Under the command of Captain John Mason, a party of English soldiers charged inside the wooden palisades, with the remainder of colonists and Indians encircling the village. The dense clusters of wigwams frustrated the English; there were too many places for Indians to hide. Grabbing a firebrand, Mason declared, "We Must Burn Them" and "set the *Wigwams* on Fire." Emerging from the flaming village, the English joined their native allies and fired on any person who attempted to escape. It was all over in less than an hour. Three to four hundred Pequot men, women, and children perished; only a handful escaped.²³

²² Winthrop, *History of New England*, 1: 190, 195 ("crept into a swamp"); Gardener, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 3: 142 ("thus began the war"). In his summary of the war, Gardener repeated his claim that this scalp triggered it, remarking that all the bloodshed of the war happened "only because Kichamokin [Cutshamakin], a Bay Indian, killed one Pequit." See Gardener, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 3: 151 (quotation); Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 218.

²³ J. Hammond Trumbull, ed., *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, Prior to the Union with New Haven Colony, May, 1665 . . .* (Hartford, Conn., 1850), 1:

Though this mass slaughter violated the normal practices of Indian warfare, it had the curious effect of strengthening the anti-Pequot alliance. The Mohegan and Narragansett warriors “greatly admired the manner of *English* mens fight,” but they “cried *mach it, mach it*; that is, it is naught, it is naught, because it is too furious, and slaies too many men.” As Francis Jennings pointed out, in the seventeenth century “*admire*” implied awe rather than approval, and “*naught*” was a term for “bad or wicked.” Their protests were not solely motivated by sympathy for the Pequots; they also realized how dangerous it was to punish an enemy with such a devastating attack. It could potentially unleash never-ending cycles of retribution. After raiding the smoking remains of the Mystic village to gather Pequot heads, the Indian allies were well aware that they were complicit in the massacre. They now had to ensure that the colonists would defend them should the Pequots return. Two months later a Pequot captive told an English officer “that were it not for the English the Pecots would not yet feare the Narra[gansetts]” and that “when they submitt to the Narraganset they say it is meerly for the English sake.”²⁴ In the following months, as the Mohegans, Narragansetts, and Niantics delivered Pequot heads and hands to the English, they were inspired not just by memories of the English attack at Mystic but by visions of a Pequot revenge yet to come.

Colonists similarly feared the prospect of facing a wounded and furious enemy alone. As one soldier wrote, “It is not good to give breathing to a beaten enemy, lest he returne armed if not with greater puissance, yet with greater despiht and revenge.” If the English-Indian alliance had splintered, it was possible that the Pequots could have

9 (“there shalbe”); Mason, *Brief History of the Pequot War*, 7–10 (“We Must,” 8). For accounts of John Tilley’s capture, see Winthrop, *History of New England*, 1: 200; Gardener, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 3: 147–48. Descriptions of the Mystic attack are found in Underhill, *Nevves From America*, 28–29, 36–42; Winthrop, *History of New England*, 1: 217, 260; Vincent, *True Relation of the Late Battell*, 6, 10–14; Mason, *Brief History of the Pequot War*, ix, 7–10. Historians offer varying numbers of Pequots in the fortified Mystic village, citing as few as three hundred and as many as seven hundred. But the evidence seemingly favors the lower end of the range. All sources written at the time of the war place the number at three or four hundred, and only John Mason’s account, which was written much later and defended the necessity of the attack due to the Pequots’ overwhelming numerical superiority, offered the suspicious outlier of “*six or seven hundred*.” See Mason, *Brief History of the Pequot War*, 10.

²⁴ Underhill, *Nevves From America*, 42–43 (“greatly admired”); Jennings, *Invasion of America*, 223 (“*admire*”); Israel Stoughton to John Winthrop, ca. July 6, 1637, in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Winthrop Papers*, 3: 441–44 (“that were it not,” 3: 443). For two interpretations of why the English burned the village, see Hirsch, *Journal of American History* 74: 1187–1212; Karr, *Journal of American History* 85: 876–909.

regrouped to fight a prolonged war against the colonists, who were vulnerable without their partners. A mere ninety colonists participated in the Mystic massacre, and later English attack parties were often much smaller. Even after Mystic, officers at one point had to redirect their undermanned units "for fear of the *Pequots* Invasion."²⁵ These soldiers depended on the Indian men marching by their side, offering much-needed military support and guiding them through unfamiliar landscapes. For English and Indians alike, heads and hands represented mutual guarantees for a safe future.

Colonists and their native partners spent the summer chasing hundreds of Pequots as they scattered to Long Island and the Hudson River while sachem Sassacus tried in vain to reassemble his people and fight back. The specter of Mystic undoubtedly helped colonists recruit former Pequot tributaries to join the coalition. When Long Island sachem Waiandance came to Saybrook "to know if [the English] were angry with all Indians," fort commander Gardener replied, "No, but only with such as had killed Englishmen." Waiandance then asked if his people could resume trade. Yes, Gardener said, but with the following conditions: "If you will kill all the Pequits that come to you, and send me their heads," then "you shall have trade with us."²⁶ Gardener also insinuated that Indians who refused to bring heads and wampum would be assumed to be harboring Pequots and could be held responsible for any belligerent actions. The Indians who had avoided the war now had only two choices: they were either with the English or against them.

The English enticed and bullied Indians from all around Long Island Sound and the interior into bringing them body parts. In the case of the Mohegans, Narragansetts, and Niantics, trophies were insurance against the return of Pequot warriors. For other previously neutral groups, such as the Montauks and Quinnipiaks, heads and hands were the price of admission into an English protection and trade racket that superficially resembled the structure of an Indian sachemship. The triumphant Mason explained the effect of the demand for body parts: "The *Pequots* now became a Prey to all *Indians*. Happy were they that could bring in their Heads to the *English*: Of which there came almost daily to *Winsor*, or *Hartford*." News of this head exchange spread quickly, and groups that only had loose ties to the Pequots joined in, including the inland Nipmucks, who delivered three Pequot heads to Williams. The delivery of parts became such a common occurrence in

²⁵ Vincent, *True Relation of the Late Battell*, 15 ("It is not good"); Mason, *Brief History of the Pequot War*, 13 ("for fear").

²⁶ Gardener, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 3: 150 (quotations); Mason, *Brief History of the Pequot War*, 14.

the summer of 1637 that Massachusetts Governor John Winthrop seemed to lose track of the specifics, at one point making a casual remark about the "still many Pequods' heads and hands [coming] from Long Island and other places."²⁷

Even after they lost count of the mutilated parts of their enemies, puritan colonists still had to square the head and hand exchange with their vision of New England as a new Canaan. For some this particular kind of violence recalled David's campaigns against the heathens of the Holy Land. In an attempt to silence any critics of the massacre at Mystic and the bloodiness of the war itself, Underhill cited the example of "*David's warre*": "when a people is growne to such a height of blood, and sinne against God and man, and all confederates in the action, there hee hath no respect to persons, but harrowes them, and sawes them, and puts them to the sword, and the most terriblest death that may bee: sometimes the Scripture declareth women and children must perish with their parents." Underhill's phrase "harrowes them, and sawes them" was a reference to David's treatment of the Ammonites. On conquering them David "put *them* under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brickkiln." Though Underhill recognized that Indians intended heads and hands to be symbols of friendship, he preferred to see the mass destruction and dismemberments of the war as evidence of the puritans' righteousness. As Underhill put it: "we had sufficient light from the word of God for our proceedings."²⁸

Colonists did not rely solely on their Indian partners to harrow and saw their enemies; they soon began to mete out Davidic justice with their own hands. In July 1637 English soldiers beheaded two captured

²⁷ Mason, *Brief History of the Pequot War*, 17 ("*Pequots* now became"); Winthrop, *History of New England*, 1: 237 ("still many Pequods' heads"). For accounts of other Indian groups supplying heads, see Roger Williams to John Winthrop, July 15, [1637], in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Winthrop Papers*, 3: 450–52.

²⁸ Underhill, *Nevves From America*, 40 ("*David's warre*," "we had sufficient light"); 2 Sam. 12:31 ("put *them* under saws"). Elsewhere in his narrative, Underhill cites the psalms of the "sweet affectionate Prince and souldier" David as a source of strength: "I will not feare that man can doe unto me, saith *David*, no nor what troubles can doe, but will trust in the Lord, who is my God." See Underhill, *Nevves From America*, 31, 35–36; Ps. 118:6. The conquest of Ammon in the King James Bible is probably mistranslated. In the New Revised Standard Version, the passage reads that David "set them to work with saws and iron picks and iron axes, or sent them to the brickworks." Still, to Underhill, "harrowes" and "sawes" referred to violence, not tools of coercive labor. And Underhill was not the only colonist who made such connections. In his celebration of the Treaty of Hartford, Mason quoted David's thirty-fourth psalm: "*How the Face of God is set against them that do Evil, to cut off the Remembrance of them from the Earth.*" See Mason, *Brief History of the Pequot War*, 20–21; Ps. 34:16.

Pequots, one of whom was a sachem, and then named the site of the execution "Sacheme head." About a year later, puritan colonists in the nascent settlement of Quinnipiac (later New Haven) tried and convicted a local Indian named Nepaupuck for his alleged earlier cooperation with the Pequots. After his execution they placed Nepaupuck's head on a pole in their new town square. When colonists used heads to mark the center of town or a place on a map, they made declarative statements about their power and permanence on the landscape. These executions, however, did not always go as planned. In the final months of the war, English soldiers took seven Niantic men captive and accused them of aiding Pequots. The colonists "intended to have made [them] shorter by the Head" when a Narragansett sachem stepped in on their behalf and reassured the colonists that these men were loyal allies, telling them that "*if we [the English] would spare their Lives we should have as many Murtherers Heads in lieu of them which should be delivered to the English.*"²⁹ Those Niantics kept their heads with a promise to substitute colonists' desired relics of treason with native tokens of alliance.

Despite rare negotiations like this one, the defining feature of the postwar traffic in heads was its one-way direction. There is no recorded instance of the English giving a head to Indians. Accordingly, colonists saw the gifts as signs of submission. Noting the trophy taking at Mystic, Philip Vincent described the Narragansetts and Mohegans "waiting [for] the fall of the Pequets, (as the dogge watcheth the shot of the fouler to fetch the prey) still fetched them their heades, as any were slaine." Mason echoed this metaphor with his phrase "the *Pequots* now became a Prey."³⁰ Though never viewing themselves as either the obedient hounds or the rapacious wolves that some English thought them to be, the Indians might have seen the asymmetrical exchanges as an indication of the English belief in their own superiority. Even as the English made their interpretation more explicit after the war, there remained unresolved tensions between native and colonial practices of dismemberment. Though the English understood the basic Indian intentions behind trophies, they tended to diminish whatever political claims those trophies carried with them.

No colonist had a better understanding of native culture than Williams, yet even he expressed a strong desire to reject Indian practices

²⁹ Richard Davenport to Hugh Peter, ca. July 17, 1637, in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Winthrop Papers*, 3: 452–54 ("Sacheme head," 452); Mason, *Brief History of the Pequot War*, 19 ("intended"). The July executions are also discussed in Hubbard, *History of the Indian Wars*, 2: 31. For the beheading of Nepaupuck, see Cave, *Pequot War*, 163.

³⁰ Vincent, *True Relation of the Late Battell*, 12 ("waiting [for] the fall"); Mason, *Brief History of the Pequot War*, 17 ("Pequots now").

and to recast trophy giving as an unambiguous act of deference. On receiving three pairs of Pequot hands from Narragansett warriors in the late summer of 1637, Williams described them as “no pleasing Sight,” for he had “alwaies showne dislike to such dismembring [of] the dead.” Despite Williams’s obvious discomfort with the relics, he still accepted them from the Narragansetts and then passed them on to Winthrop. “If I had buried the present my selfe,” he wrote begrudgingly, “I should have incurd suspicion of pride and wronged my betters, in the natives and others eyes.” Recognizing the layered significance of the hands, Williams had to balance his personal feelings with the needs of his fellow colonists and Indian friends and participate in a practice that he found somewhat repugnant. But though dead hands troubled him, they also inspired him. Williams recognized that receiving parts had helped to legitimize the English conquest and considered ways to continue the practice after the Pequots were subdued. In a letter to Winthrop a few months later, Williams offered his “owne thoughts concerning a division and disposal of” the remaining Pequots. He proposed that “as once Edgar the Peaceable did with the Welsh in North Wales, a tribute of wolves heads be imposed on them etc. w[hi]ch (with Submission) I conceive an incomparable way to Save much Cattell alive in the land.” Williams hoped to extend English power and defend English livestock while mimicking native trophy exchanges and employing Indians, much as Vincent and Mason saw them, as useful predators. His fellow colonists rejected Williams’s animal control policy, though other communities in New England later offered wolf head bounties to Indians.³¹

Though Williams imagined a future where colonists had full control of trophy exchanges and could orchestrate them as they saw fit, he knew all too well that Indian priorities shaped the original practice just as much as English ones. Colonists unfailingly requested heads from their native partners, but they often received hands instead. No Englishman ever refused hands and demanded heads in their place, yet the pattern itself is revealing. As a cross-cultural conversation, the exchange of body parts relied on false cognates: hands were not the same as heads or even

³¹ Roger Williams, “To John Winthrop,” ca. Sept. 9, 1637, in LaFantasie, *Correspondence of Roger Williams*, 1: 117–21 (“no pleasing Sight,” 1: 117); Winthrop, *History of New England*, 1: 237 (“If I had buried”); Williams to Winthrop, Feb. 28, 1638, in LaFantasie, *Correspondence of Roger Williams*, 1: 146 (“owne thoughts”). Williams only expressed qualms about the physical trophies, not the war itself, since he saw the Pequots as a real menace. Describing his diplomatic visits “with the bloudie Pequot Embassadors, whose Hands and Arms (me thoght,) reaked with the bloud of my Countrimen,” he recalled that he “could not but nightly looke for their bloudy Knives at my owne throate also.” See Williams to John Mason and Thomas Prentice, June 22, 1670, *ibid.*, 2: 611. Further discussion of wolf head bounties is found in Coleman, *Common-place* 4.

scalps. Hands mattered to Indians because amputating them was a crucial step in the slow ritual torture of captives and may have metaphorically referred to the custom of consuming enemies. Still it is not clear why exactly Indians sometimes only gave hands. It is possible some warriors preferred to keep the head or scalp for themselves or their sachem and then offered the leftover hands to the none-the-wiser colonists. The difficulty of transporting a heavy and rotting human remain also seems to have been a factor—William Hubbard cited that as a reason natives gave scalps instead of heads—but was a pair of hands any less cumbersome? Furthermore Indian men, who were hunters more often than warriors, certainly knew how to preserve dead flesh. They may have preserved their trophies, just as English executioners parboiled heads to ready them for display. So perhaps the gift of hands instead of a head or a scalp indicated that the Indian bearer was in a rush either to take the trophies or to deliver them.³² These meanings and reasons were all opaque to the English. Like anyone trying to decipher a foreign language, they latched on to whatever was most recognizable or easily translated (heads, scalps) and glossed over what they did not quite grasp (hands). Colonists also realized that sometimes the precise part mattered less than the intentions of the people delivering it.

The English were both celebratory and wary when Mohawk Indians arrived in Connecticut in the fall of 1637 with “part of the skin and lock of hair of [chief sachem] Sasacus and his brother and five other Pequod sachems.” Mohawks loomed large in native and colonial imaginations. Suspicion of the Mohawks stemmed from their fearsome reputation among the coastal Indians and from their identity not as a nearby group seemingly cowed by the Mystic massacre but rather as a distant force that was possibly more interested in strengthening ties with native powers than colonial ones. For the next decade, rumors continued to circulate about a Mohawk-Narragansett alliance. According to Plymouth colonist William Bradford, whether the Mohawks’ delivery was “to satisfy the English, or rather the Narigansets, (who, as I have since heard, hired them to doe it,) or for their owne advantage, I well know not; but thus this warr tooke end.” Another account described the assassination of Sassacus as an unambiguous act designed to curry favor with the colonists: “These cruell, but wily Mowhacks, in contemplation of the English, and to procure their friendship, entertain[e]d the fugitive Pequets and their Captaine, by cutting off all their heads and hands, which they sent to the English, as a testimony of their love and service.”

³² There is no evidence to suggest that some hands came from still-living Pequots whose heads had been spared and that therefore these hands were producing a counterfeit tally of the actual number of men killed.

Other colonists were less troubled by the ulterior motives of their new allies and focused on the figurative and literal head of the Pequot sachemship that now rested in English hands, which seemed to merit Bradford's remark about the conclusion of the war. After Connecticut colonists presented the scalp to Winthrop in the fall of 1637, he immediately summoned his soldiers home.³³

Though Winthrop and Bradford chose to see Sassacus's scalp as punctuation marking the end of the war, the conflict came to an official close a year later, when the English, Mohegans, and Narragansetts met in Hartford. The 1638 Treaty of Hartford gave the colonists and their closest allies a chance to divvy up the material and human rewards of the war, a process they had begun the previous summer, when Indians and English split the Pequots' corn harvest. Additionally, the treaty formalized the existing practice of area Indians offering wampum tribute to colonial governors, payments that bought English protection (and protection from the English). Colonists would soon claim that the treaty and the tributes gave them a legal basis to make these peoples and their territories part of New England. The English could also recirculate the tributes in the fur trade, using them as Indian subsidies for further colonial growth.³⁴

The treaty also settled the fate of the surviving Pequots. With most of the refugees now taken captive, the English, Mohegans, and Narragansetts each wanted their share of the defeated population. The two major Indian sachemships had already been incorporating captured Pequots into their lineages for more than a year, but the colonists declared all Pequots "theirs" by right of conquest, claiming that the Indians would have to purchase the captives they had already taken. The

³³ Winthrop, *History of New England*, 1: 235 ("part of the skin"); William Bradford, *Bradford's History of Plymouth Plantation*, ed. William T. Davis (New York, 1908), 6: 343 ("to satisfie the English"); Vincent, *True Relation of the Late Battell*, 17 ("wily Mowhacks"). For a larger analysis of the Mohawks' role on the New England frontier, see Salisbury, "Indians and Colonists in Southern New England after the Pequot War: An Uneasy Balance," in Hauptman and Wherry, *Pequots in Southern New England*, 81–95; Salisbury, "Toward the Covenant Chain: Iroquois and Southern New England Algonquians, 1637–1684," in *Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois and Their Neighbors in Indian North America, 1600–1800*, ed. Daniel K. Richter and James H. Merrell (Syracuse, N.Y., 1987), 61–74.

³⁴ Roger Williams to John Winthrop, [July 10, 1637], in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Winthrop Papers*, 3: 446–48, esp. 3: 447–48; Hugh Peter to Winthrop, ca. July 15, 1637, *ibid.*, 3: 450. Lynn Ceci makes the point that wampum from Indians funded English expansion. See Ceci, "Native Wampum as a Peripheral Resource in the Seventeenth-Century World-System," in Hauptman and Wherry, *Pequots in Southern New England*, 48–63. For a discussion of the war's aftermath, see Salisbury, "Indians and Colonists in Southern New England after the Pequot War," *ibid.*, 81–95.

English demanded a fathom of wampum beads for every adult Pequot and half as much for each child. The English also confiscated several dozen Pequots for themselves. Some of these Pequots were "branded on the shoulder" and became slaves within colonial households; others found themselves sent to Providence Island to work on plantations. An additional clause in the treaty stipulated that the Indians "shall as soon as they can possibly take off [the] heads" of any remaining Pequot fugitives.³⁵ The Treaty of Hartford codified head exchange and slavery and intimately linked the two as the colonists took possession of the living bodies and the lifeless parts of their enemies.

Though the only obvious Indian contributions to the treaty were a few inky marks on the bottom of the page, Indians had a large influence on the specific terms of peace and on English conduct after the war. Colonists adhered to Indian practices: they took captives, exchanged war trophies, and offered gifts while demanding wampum tribute in return. These gestures made English colonial authority resemble Algonquian sachemic authority. The English won the war not just by slaughtering Pequots but by usurping them as the greatest power on Long Island Sound and by emulating their methods of rule. Indians certainly saw resemblances. On hearing of the English demand for wampum and heads, Montauk sachem Waiandance immediately drew a parallel to the old regime, saying "we will give you tribute, as we did the Pequits." A Quinnipiac sachem echoed this feeling, telling the English "that as Long Iland had payd tribute to [Pequot sachem] Sasacas hee would procure it to vs."³⁶ Yet these acts of cultural impersonation were never fully convincing because the Indians' and colonists' most talented brokers—men such as Williams, Uncas, and Miantonomo—could not reconcile the differences between each others' beliefs. More importantly, the English had no reason to resolve the situation: these garbled translations worked to their advantage.

The Narragansetts and Mohegans had to come to terms with a conquest that was as creative as it was violent. They had not entered the war with the intention of submitting to their new partners; they fought to defeat a declining but still dangerous enemy and to secure a steady source of European trade goods. Though the English imitation of their reciprocal practices may have made the new alliances seem familiar, the

³⁵ Appendix II, "Articles Between the Inglish in Connecticut and the Indians Sachems," in Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, 340–41 ("theirs," "shall as soon," 341); Cave, *Pequot War*, 159 ("branded on the shoulder"); Fickes, *New England Quarterly* 73: 61 n. 13.

³⁶ Gardener, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 3: 150 ("we will give"); Richard Davenport to Hugh Peter, ca. July 17, 1637, in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Winthrop Papers*, 3: 452–54 ("that as Long Iland," 3: 452).

differences soon became evident. Miantonomo made his displeasure known whenever he felt the English had slighted or mistreated him, at one point griping to Williams: "*Chenock eiuse wetompatimucks?* that is, Did ever friends deal so with friends?" In the years following the war, his protests grew louder. As he eventually began to encourage other sachems to join him in a war against the colonists in 1642, Miantonomo pointed out that the English governors "are no Sachems, nor none of their children shall be in their place if they die; and they have no tribute given them; there is but one king in England, who is over them all, and if you would send him 100,000 fathom of wampum, he would not give you a knife for it, nor thank you."³⁷ According to Miantonomo, even if the puritan leaders tried to impersonate sachems, their attempts were ultimately unconvincing because their notions of power were so foreign. They belonged to a far larger polity, one that did not function through recognizable rituals of reciprocity or structures of kinship, one that invested earthly power in a distant sovereign and spiritual power in a single, even more remote god. Gifts of wampum and heads were rendered useless by the insincerity and ingratitude of the receivers.

In the same speech, Miantonomo described his plans for a native rebellion that would spring into action with a coordinated exchange of heads and hands. This new network of trophy exchange, unlike the English one, was more circular than centralized, based more on the shared fates of all participants than on the dominance of one (even if the Narragansett sachem saw himself as the likely leader of the alliance). And it was predicated on a new kind of pan-Indian identity. According to Miantonomo any other choice led to extinction: "We [are] all Indians as the English are, and say brother to one another; so must we be one as they are, otherwise we shall be all gone shortly." Miantonomo's daring plot and his pleas for Indian solidarity suggest that he regretted his role in the Pequot War and felt the postwar order was a death sentence for all coastal Algonquians.³⁸

In contrast no Indian was more satisfied with the results of the war than Uncas, chief sachem of the Mohegans. In the following years, he used his friendship with elite colonials to empower his people over the Narragansetts and the other native groups in the region. He played a major role in the discovery and suppression of Miantonomo's plot, and

³⁷ Williams to Winthrop, Aug. 20, 1637, in LaFantasie, *Correspondence of Roger Williams*, 113 ("*Chenock*," emphasis added); Gardener, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 3: 153 ("are no Sachems").

³⁸ Gardener, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 3: 154 (quotation). Further discussion of Miantonomo's disillusionment with the English is found in Robinson, "Lost Opportunities," 23–28; Pulsipher, *Subjects unto the Same King*, 25–27.

Uncas's brother executed the Narragansett sachem with a blow to the head. Yet no matter how powerful he seemed in comparison to the other Indians, Uncas had essentially gone from one tributary relationship to another. Just months after he stopped delivering wampum to the Pequot sachem, Uncas began offering heads to the English newcomers. What began as a military partnership quickly became a relationship between unequals, since the colonists demanded deference to their authority.³⁹

Though Uncas's strategy for accommodating the English required a partial surrender of Indian self-rule, Europeans never fully eliminated the natives of Long Island Sound. The ultimate legacy of the Pequot War was not extermination but subordination. Coastal Indian powers were never again free from European rule, though Wampanoag sachem Metacom (known as King Philip to the English) would lead a vast coalition of Algonquians in an unsuccessful 1675 attempt to regain their autonomy. By the 1640s, the English governors had accomplished what Pequot sachem Tatobem had tried to create in the 1620s: a vast and durable network of tributaries stretching across Long Island Sound.

In its gory specifics, the Pequot War offers powerful examples of Indians shaping the history of early America. Motivated to different degrees by colonial intimidation, colonial persuasion, and their own self-interest, these Indians, with the exception of the Pequots, both willingly and unwillingly legitimized postwar English authority by delivering heads, hands, and other tributes. There was no top-down imposition of the invaders' cultural order; rather, the English seized power by accepting and reinterpreting symbolic gifts from the people they claimed to rule. Corporeal pieces functioned, as Miantonomo imagined, as connecting bonds between disunited people. Still the trophies' power to express trust and translate foreign ideas was limited, since body parts were a crude means of communication that invited misinterpretation. And for the Indians who delivered trophies to the English, the ultimate results of these negotiations were tinged with irony. For every Pequot head they cut off, an English one grew back in its place.

³⁹ For an analysis of how Uncas maintained a degree of cultural and political autonomy, see Johnson, "Uncas and the Politics of Contact," 35–46.